

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Ki Teitzei
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פרשת כי תצא
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Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 21:10-25:19

In this *parasha*, Moshe enumerates many laws that relate to topics of family relationships, interpersonal ethics, and forbidden mixtures.

The concept of צדק (*tzedek*), righteousness/justice, that featured prominently in last week's *parasha* continues this week (24:10-15):

י כי-תִּשֶׂה בְּרַעַף, מִשְׂאֵת מְאוּמָה--לֹא-תָבֵא אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ, לְעֵבֵט עֵבֶטוֹ. יא בַּחוּץ, תִּעְמַד; וְהָאִישׁ, אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה נִשֶּׂה בוֹ, יוֹצִיא אֵלֶיךָ אֶת-הָעֵבוֹט, הַחוּצָה. יב וְאִם-אִישׁ עָנִי, הוּא--לֹא תִשְׁכַּב, בְּעֵבֶטוֹ. יג הִשָּׁב תִּשָּׁיב לוֹ אֶת-הָעֵבוֹט כְּבוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, וְשָׁכַב בְּשִׁלְמָתוֹ וּבִרְכָךְ; וְלֵךְ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ. יד לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂק שָׂכִיר, עָנִי וְאֲבִיוֹן, מֵאַחֶיךָ, אוֹ מִגֵּרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּאַרְצְךָ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ. טו בְּיוֹמוֹ תִּתֵּן שְׂכָרוֹ וְלֹא-תָבוֹא עָלָיו הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, כִּי עָנִי הוּא, וְאֵלָיו, הוּא נֹשֵׂא אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ; וְלֹא-יִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ אֶל-ה', וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא.

10 When you lend your neighbor any manner of loan, you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge. **11** You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring forth the pledge outside to you. **12** And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge; **13** You shall surely restore to him the pledge when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his garment, and bless you; and it shall be righteousness for you before Hashem your God. **14** You shall not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he is [one of] your brothers, or of your strangers that are in your land within your gates. **15** On the same day you shall give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it: and he should not cry against you to Hashem and it will be in you a sin.

In this passage the Torah displays sensitivities which we might not otherwise consider. We may collect pledges if we lend someone something, but under no circumstances may we embarrass debtors, invade their personal space, or keep something that they would need in order to function. We must treat servants fairly and justly and therefore pay day-laborers on the same day that they work.

These *mitzvot* contrast starkly with the laws of some other ancient civilizations. Both the Greeks and the Romans treated slaves as chattel without consideration of human rights or human dignity. The upper class did not work, as manual labor was considered beneath contempt. Not so the Jewish people: work was, and still is, considered highly honorable in the Jewish tradition. Every major Rabbi, almost without exception, earned his living with an ordinary job. Hillel (1st Century CE) was a woodcutter; Rashi (11th Century) was a vintner; Rambam (12th Century) and Ramban (13th Century) were both physicians; and the Chafetz Chaim (19th Century) was a shopkeeper.

This work ethic is so central in Judaism that it appears right at the beginning of the Torah. It is one example of *imitatio Dei* – our obligation to emulate God. God, in the infinity of Divine power, could have waved a proverbial wand and caused the entire world to come into being in an instant. This is not what the Torah relates. Rather, it took Hashem six days to finish the physical creation of the world. As the Torah says in the *Aseret Hadibrot* (Ten Commandments) in *Shmot* (Exodus) 20:7-10:

ז זְכוֹר אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת, לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. ח שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד, וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלֶאכֶתֶךָ. ט יוֹם, הַשְּׁבִיעִי--שַׁבָּת, לַה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ: לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-מְלֶאכֶה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ, עֹבֵדְךָ וְאַמְתֶּךָ וּבְהֵמְתֶךָ, וְגֵרְךָ, אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ. י כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ, אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם, וַיִּנַּח, בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי; עַל-כֵּן, בֵּרַךְ ה' אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת--וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ.

7 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. **8** Six days shall you labor, and do all your work; **9** but the seventh day is a sabbath to Hashem your God, in it you shall not do any manner of work; you, your son, your daughter, your man-servant, your maid-servant, your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; **10** for in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore Hashem blessed the sabbath day, and made it holy.

Hashem did many an “honest day’s work,” perhaps to model to humanity that this is the way to live. Earning a living to the best of one’s ability goes hand-in-hand with

tzedakah (righteous giving) in terms of supporting those who, through no fault of their own, cannot earn a living. This is one of the primary messages of the section from *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) from this week's *parasha* quoted above.

After our six days of working this week, and being exhausted by the four days of the first week of school, may everyone have a Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What do you want to be when you grow up? Why did you choose that?
- If you won the lottery, like the woman last week who won \$740 million, and had no further need to work for a living, would you still hold down a job? Why or why not? Would you change the way you live? If not, why not? If so, how?
- Maimonides says the highest form of *tzedakah* to provide for someone who is poor is to give the person a job. Why do you think he believes this?